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APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

BY
JOHN HELSTON

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New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1913



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APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD *

Four streams: whose whole delight in island
lawns,

Dark-hanging alder dusks and willows pale
O'er shining grey-green shadowed waterways,
Makes murmuring haste of exit from the vale—
Through fourteen arches voluble
Where river tide-weed sways.

Whose burthen is of things insoluble
From hidden deeps below the hills where yawns
Some veinous and insatiable Desire,
That sits for ever there

* Without presuming to "present" Mr. Helston after the manner of fashionable actors, we think it will interest the public to know that he was for years a working mechanic—turner, fitter, &c.—in electrical, locomotive, motor-car, and other workshops.

4 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

When Summer fills the valley with slow fire,
Whereto the stealthy Mole is minister
In secret places damp and caverns dire.

Red brick-work lichened grey; grey stone to
green:

Mossed corner-crannies flowerful with flame:
And red roofs hiding daily deeper now,
As Spring comes quietly the hills between—
With deeper breath misting the elms below.
And the old walls—but yellow ere she came—
Are gladly golden as they take the sun;
And brightly bronze about them poplars
grow. . . .

All things in shine and shadow seem to know
That spring is everywhere and benison.

Clear to their pebbled floors the waters move
To mix their several courses in one tide. . . .

And there I saw Spring floating, like a bride
Veiled in the weft of her own dreams: and Love
Laughed in the spray he shook from off his vans;
And through bright water-drops his countenance
Was roguish as a young god's face above
The amorous ways of some white nymph, grown
coy

Of love for long, till conquered by the boy
Among her secret rushes. I descried
These things, and others, on the southern side.

Yea, all was sweetly, of a sudden, strange.
Were no more houses, but great woods that
passed

Into the shadows of some mountain range
Crowned with a sunlight coronet of snows.
Now shining flowers, by verdant glooms o'ercast,
Along a bank beside blue water rose.

6 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Blue water broken by low waterfalls
And plashy places, strewn with rocks and sand,
As Naiads would delight. There one did stand
In a broad sunlight; like some statue planned
Of Love himself, whose marble meaning calls
Out of the ages:—more a vital thing
Than many a heart of beats grown dead to
 spring,
Whose body is a sepulchre that palls,
With its own pallid plinth, all burgeoning
Of primal joys at Love's chief festivals.
All loveliness to make one greatly mad
With dreams whereof men grow more madly
 great
Upon that glory which, of starry date,
Crowns Beauty's co-eternal high estate;
All these good things she had.
There was a sweet, pure passion in her eyes

To make all cynic sense grow gladly wise—
E'en sorrow, wisely glad.

All things, it seemed, to her were ministers:
Thrushes, flute-throated, shook the shades with
 song,

In amorous, rich, and lovely echoes long.
So, nightingales in sunlight would rehearse
Their moontide music: and a fairy throng
Of blue-winged butterflies would oft repair
To visit the broad blossom of her hair,
That, like some golden-hanging creeper, clung
Round the wild rose-buds of her bosom there.
All things that deem it more to live and die,
And to bring forth and blossom, than to lose
The fear of death by being never born,
Did pilgrimage about her feet—to vie
In plenitude of thanks. And each in turn,

8 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Among a many there, had power to choose
That gift she deemed most gracious. Thus
 cuckoos

Made woodland evening mellow with their cry,
But sometimes sang all night, till they should
 learn

The ordered harmony of night and morn
That pleased her most. And all that liberty
Which is Love's servant and his great reward—
Whose virtue bids growth grow, and melody
Be made of bird, and leaves' delightful tune,
And the green grateful guerdon of the sward
Be gladder, being free;

And all the phased enchantment of the moon,
And every change of sun or starry light,
That made her woodland places wonderful
With cloud and beams and shadows dark or
 bright—

All these did praise her of their own accord,
Whilst all around was heard,
On loom-gales tender over day and night,
The mystery of Love's most lovely word,
Spring's foam-flung "APHRODITE."

All white she was, but as the foam of May
Is white on apple-orchards under stars.
Her like I have not seen by mortal day,
By many a night, when dreams were avatars
Of Love's delight, I have not seen it. Nay!
Not since youth died, and love has passed
away. . . .

It may be few are tempted so as are
Poets; for whom is woman's loveliness
Made lovelier than morning may express
With all those hues whereof her melting star
Is tender witness. Through the evening woods

10 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Song floating on the sunset's ardent floods
Is very lovely: and there is a noon,
So tense with Summer's passionate distress
Of extreme silent Beauty's breathlessness
That all things seem to swoon
Down the large luxury of languor's dreams—
So prodigal it teems
With passion's trance, mid-rapture craves for
 boon.

All greatly good are these: their several praise
Make up the total of the poet's ways,
That lead his soul to God that is in art.
But surer lies there even,
Of all his roads to heaven:—
High dreams, wherein a woman plays her
 part.

Where, mingled in some supreme period,
Their blood accelerates the heart of God.

Who has loved greatly has more greatly lived
Than those for whom is life a market-place.
Not for his breadth of Being were contrived
Of man the scales, or measure of his grace.
But he has made his bargain face to face
With God—if there be God in more than lies
Of ancient vogue, that in the Truth's disguise
Were hawked by priests as unction for sore eyes,
Till all the world was blinded, and fell down
Before such gods beside whom wood and stone
Were truths of wholesome aspect. At the throne
Of her, God's goddess of the year's great Truth
That is in Spring and primal Nature's passion,
I did fall down in fancy of such fashion
That all my soul, and body too, forsooth!
Cried out in worship holy. Like a youth,
When Longing's ecstasies would fan the fires
Of love's delirium to strange desires

12 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

That hang 'twixt earth and heaven, was I then!
Forgotten, all, were baser things of men:
All baseness known of women I forgot.
And all the morning of pure passion's pain
Rang rapturous responses through my brain—
Love's own dear antidote.

Then spake I to this lady in such wise: —
"O Incarnation lovely of my Love,
O lovely lust of Increase called of Spring,
O Bride of Burgeoning,
I am become all bridegroom for thine eyes!
In every sense of me thine echoes teem:
By this broad mirror of the noon above
The stars still set and rise
To watch thee from the darkness of their dream!
Their passion I can trace
Reflected in thy face!

APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD 13

For thee, with voice of worship, calls the stream;
The slow clouds rise from holy mountain tops
Like incense for thee blown in silver steam;
And the pure fountain drops
Her singing shade of rainbows through the beam!
All things are quick to love, this April day.
There is a world of longing in the wind
About thy tresses twined:
It listeth, or it lusteth—Who shall say?

“O Goddess of the glory in green leaves,
I am heart-hungry, I, thy worshipper!
And fasting sense within my soul perceives,
Thou lovely whisperer,
That famished I may feed my full of thee!
Let us behind the mountains and the sea
To some far land where sorrow never dwells,
Nor ever evil comes;

14 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Where often I have tracked thee through the
dells,

And thy soft south wind roams,

Laden with fragrant breathing of bluebells!

There may I mix myself with bounteous thine:

In all my various need and veins I pine:

Let me be made one with thee, and divine!

“God gave His sanction, surely, when He gave

A soul to man and beauty to the world,

To claim the light within a falling wave,

The moonrise and the daydawn dew-empearled,

And every dædal impulse of the sun,

For Joy's own bride, Imagination.

To fill with increase earthly truth, and save,

With gracious things, the soul this side the
grave. . . .

And thou, O lovely One, art all of Truth!

Thou art Truth's greatest goddess, that I know :
Long have I loved thee, from my youngest youth
Upwards. Oh, hear me, Goddess; let us go!
And, as we go, forgive that I have sinned
In loving thee too little anywhere!
I hear a voice of whispers on the wind :
*'Fair as she is, she yet would be more fair,
And yet more dear, for thee to clasp her there,
Than thou hast ever known!'*
Surely the fountain's shade is in thy hair,
Clear-falling, full of music of low tone.
And trees are surely making lovely moan
To swell my longing's prayer :—
Alone!—the fountain; and the trees—alone!
Oh, hearken! Oh, mine only goddess, hark!
Immortal ocean mads me—yon great pine
Voices that sea whereon we will embark
For lands of love, where lesser suns grow dark

16 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Behind us, and before us, greater shine
On thine own island always! where the lark
Sings without ceasing, and his cloud of song
Is all of cloud 'twixt us and deep blue heaven!—
Lest thou shouldst slay me of this madness
 stark,
Lest I, perchance, of love should do thee
 wrong. . . .
I could do ravishment upon thee, even!

“Oh, no! I meant it not, my Aphrodite!
Be not in haste to anger thee for such!
If I did haste to lead me to delight,
Blame me not now for loving thee too much!
See, with a song I'll charm thee till art kind;
Till all things matter nothing, only love!
I'll woo thee till art won for very shame
Thou didst keep Love long waiting but to prove

The patience, not the passion, of his kind—

The wisdom, not the wonder, of his name!

*"Where thy green bowers are, by the white foam,
Oh, Aphrodité, be mine!*

*O'er waves of that song the sea sings in the pine
I am fain to pursue thee, to follow thee home,
To Desire's own echoing shrine!*

*Dark the stars are above us: wait not for the
night.*

*Oh, haste! Let us love by thine own April light,
To those dream-island murmurs of thine,
Aphrodite!*

Aphrodité! Spring's lady! Be mine!"

Then did my lady from her gracious eyes

Make only answer for a little space;

But dreams as old as any paradise

Were passing o'er the Eden of her face.

18 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

She made as if to speak me answer thrice;
And twice there came a whisper full of "Nays!"
And once there came a whisper full of sighs—
She was a very woman in her ways!
Whoso has heard the birch-wood's voice of
praise

In all her leafy languages arise,
When warm winds mould her myriad hair of
green,

With sunlight soft between;
And tenderness and tuneful artifice,
Has heard an echo, but he has not *seen*
How breathed my lady's bosom then, I ween!
For—shaking out her shining hair—thuswise
She sang; and for the manner how she sang,
I think the wind sang like it to the sea
A million years ago,
Or by some Cytherean promontory

That morning when from ocean's cave she
sprang,

With warm hair wet and heavy, hanging low,
All foam and mystery.

*"I am more fair, and haply far more human,
Than mortal maids ungracious in their love?
O Love of Mine, that wouldst so have me woman,
The sun sees, all the sky looks down above! . . .
My bosom for a great delight of kisses
Grows tender, as to woo me to thy mind.
I am grown fain to hide me in my tresses. . . .
Nay, then! shall Aphrodité prove unkind?
And am I fair, and am I dear to thee?
O Love, O Love! that thou so temptest me!"*

And I went to her: we were all alone!
And very real and near my lady smiled.
And very far away had all things gone

20 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

With Love's own lonely landscapes reconciled
But hardly. Now a shade of April trees
Made murmur through the kisses of the sun
About our coming, and a choir of birds
Sang all at once old Hymen's morning
hymn. . . .

I did not see there any Cherubim
Or flaming swords, or flaming fiddlesticks,
To frighten folk away with fire-work tricks.
And all the snakes were silent that were there
Save those soft golden ones—my lady's hair,
Through which she oft would whisper golden
words

So all her hair grew eloquent, and dim
With golden shadow all her countenance.
I thought the blue love-lightnings of her glance
Had waked men made of Arctic-midnight cold,
Had made more timid love be overbold:

For me, I walked in trance,
Too tender to be fearful, organ-souled,
From which she shook the utmost chords of
 sense,
That trembled round her wild white innocence
Like choral dawns round life's high places rolled.

We two alone through all an April shade!
Great hollies flickered argent fire and gloomed
Like dark blue midnight memories that loomed
Still permeate with brooding sense of stars.
And with a sense of day's own dye there bloomed
Long spaces steeped in bluebells' azure light,
Till earth rose heaven. Soft winds disarrayed
The birch with splendour so her myriad hairs
Were as green water-fountains falling bright
About shy limbs of their own silver sprite.
And from her greenwood lairs

22 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Did Echo steal on Echo unawares,
Through many a silent breathing of blown trees
And shadow-haunted glade
Across a world of woodland: then the breeze
Burdened with brine and long-drawn cadences,
Deep, solemn-sounding only as the sea's!

Now flashed the foam-white crescent wave and
 curled

The long blue shine of waters crowding home
With all the plangent pulse of ocean's world,
Eager to fill each separate mouth of foam
With sigh of breathing kisses salt and slow,
And print its passioned progress o'er the strand:
The sun was scarce more golden than the sand
Among the dunes of grassy beaches low.
And from the sea-wind's wide-flung first embrace
That shook the birches' hair with amorous storms

Such sweet, strong madness shuddered through
the place

We two were nigh to panic, in alarms

That only lovers feel when face to face

And joys to warmer grow.

I durst not ask surrender of those charms

She was become as eager to forgo

As I to lose my way amid her arms,

As she to lose her woman's way of "No!"

Her sense and mine swayed, trembled, danced,
and flung

Madly against each other. The blue sky

Darkened against a darker sea. We clung—

We two together—for a space, to sigh

And pant with longings inarticulate

In any language save of starry date

That Love interprets through tumultuous tears

His own warm wishes dye,

24 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

For everlasting meaning to the years;
God's breath of Lust, love's lips would sanctify.

In every vein some ancestor of old
Who clasped his bride in caverns oversea
Spake to me then; and Passion's pæan rolled
Mute from the margins of eternity
With its own might of message. "Comfort me!
O Love of Mine, you loved me long ago:
Because thou *art*, thou *wast*—in Arcady!—
Before Love's lure was laid in Ilion!—
Before Astarte or Semiramis,
Thou sawest in far forgotten years ago
How the moon held her midnight mysteries
In the untrodden places of the snow
On highest Himalaya!—We were one
In sun-warm sands that waited Babylon,
O Love of Mine that loved me long ago!

We two may meet and mix but once, no more,
In each of all our myriad lives, and oh!
A myriad streams of mingling through me flow
To mate with thine, beloved, by the shore!"

She spake it; and I knew her mine to love
In her most intimate and tender trance,
In rapture where the inner circumstance
Of Being breaks in primal blowth above
The bridal-beds of elementary pain.

I watched her pure eyes clouding with the stain
Of passion-surges grown intolerable
Against the flood-gates of her maidenhood:
And in her face a lovely shameful mood
Stained, with its blushing darkness of eclipse,
Her white skin scarlet as her anxious lips
That whispered: "Love me when the tide is
full!"

She had slipped down and left me so I stood

26 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

As one from dreams, when sudden waking strips,
From out the closure of his arms, delight
In some dear woman, captive all the night,
Whose tender ministrations memories mock
Through empty, hateful portals at his blood.
She had slipped down beneath me so I stood
Shaken, in that green shadow of the wood;
Swaying, and staring at the stricken trees
Writhing among embraces of the breeze,
I saw their white limbs rock:
Without, I heard the echoes of the tide. . . .
And now she made a place for me beside
Her lithe limbs laid among deep grass and good
For lovely strife at amorous victories:
She hid her face within its golden hood
Or ardent hair, her only veil,—my bride!
And as I kissed her through it, “At the
flood. . . .

At the full flood-tide take me!" then she gasped.
 And so we waited, mutely mad through all
 Anticipation's raptured interval,
 Limbs interwoven, beating bosoms clasped.

* * * * *

The tide had turned an hour: the outer deep
 Echoed with fainter music in our ears,
 Breathed in our blood soft, tuneful things of
 sleep:

And soft, pleached sunlights dried her passion's
 tears.

I watched a thousand recollections creep
 In faint, quick flushes from her bosom's nest
 To hide among her golden shade of hair. . . .
 My lovely Aphrodité! Oh, to rest
 All weariness of sordid struggle there,
 But once again! To me thou wast more fair,
 And art, than aught; and full of God's own love

28 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

And all the wonder of His wedded years!
I kissed His hand when I have kissed thy breast,
Surely, if there be God found anywhere!
My Aphrodité! Only once again! . . .
The memory of our mingling soars above,
Star-like, among the spheres.
Fraught with new meaning is the stellar Wain:
God's lovely lust is wound about the stars,
And every earthly atom woos its kind!
All pregnant Nature teemed that avatars
Be born in Man, to breed from every wind
Response of holy Truth, so that the mind
Of all men hear His message in their youth;
And hearing, know, as know they surely can,
That naught which man may ever do for Truth
Compares with all that Truth shall do for man!
Truth only may teach Beauty, Beauty this:—
That Love alone is worthy lord of souls;

Hate, but a hireling still the beast controls—
Ugly, a mean thing, full of blemishes,
That yet shall rise, as man rose from the beast,
Through many purifyings, till its yeast
Be potent as a purer Manhood's barm
For use on evil only, and all harm
Has lost its power to choke the centuries.
Yea! in that tranquil hemisphere of time
Men call the future hate shall cleanse the earth
With manifold Truth's teaching, for sublime
Example even unto love that worth
Is in all things that best fulfil their birth.
Yea! as the Yeast of God, in man shall rise
The sun of Truth, till evil come to dearth
Among the outer darkness, and fulfil
Its life in one great catacomb of Ill. . . .
As I dreamed thus beside her, here her eyes,
That had been veiled awhile with drowsy peace,

30 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Opened: it seemed she knew my thoughts. "To
these,

O Love of Mine, shalt add this other thing:—
Lust *was*, that Love *might be*. They blaspheme
God

Who criticise His methods. Lust is good,
And he who mocks it doth imbue his blood
With mockery against God's grace of Spring.
Lust is His breath who quickened all a world—
Too good a thing to waste on baser joy:
Whoso shall lose his lust in loveless ease
Shall find his pleasure only to destroy.
This shall be truth for lovers:—Only love
Than lust in them should holier be: above
All other ways shall this one purify!"
She paused in thought. Then both her white
arms curled

Softly about my neck. She whispered: "Dear,

Remember this hereafter; I am near,
Yea, very near thee always; and would guide
My poet's passions only to her side
Thou mayest love, and loving her, love me."
She spake the last a trifle wistfully.
"And I will so awake, I promise thee,
Her woman's nature, thou needst never roam
To clasp me ever by this island foam. . . .
My memory shall move ye in your home."

At that I made to answer; but she stopped
My mouth with many kisses for a space.
I kissed her tender eyelids when they dropped,
That could not hide the longing in her face.
But afterwards, again I answered her,
"My goddess, though were every woman fair,
That would not make her love me—make her
love:

32 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

I doubt some women know what love may be!"

Her eyes were laughing as she answered me.

"No? Can all *men* love? Art a foolish one!

There are some things e'en poets' brains above.

I say we women are so great at it,

So old we are in passion's lovely lore,

Not all men-poets that the sun shone on

Have guessed how deep Desire in us can sit

And sing such songs as Sappho sang of yore—

Nay, sings in us for ever! There is more

Of God's own meaning than a man may guess

In Woman that is Woman!" . . . Strange dis-

tress

Shook out in tremors through her frame: she

wept

Such poignant tears as only women keep.

And long it took to kiss them into sleep:

The tide was out ere she had ceased to weep. . . .

Only the wind sighed. . . . In her arms I slept.

* * * * *

Evening. . . . The further sky had faded light :

It gave the sharp sea-line a deeper hue

Than ere I slept: somewhat more darkly bright

The sea seemed,—one unbroken, lovely blue

Save for its host of small waves falling white,

As the slow tide made over emerald rocks

And broad brown levels of the chevroned sand

That gleamed to gold in places. Aphrodite

Sat by me, holding mine with one small hand

The while the other spread out wayward locks

For Fancy's idle weaving so I saw

Her blue-blown bosom's founts that glimmered
through

Had fed too long the sea-wind's chilly maw.

And at the sight my passion sprang anew

To robe her round in warm protection's clasp.

34 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

But she brake from me with a sudden gasp—
“O Love of Mine, the hour is come! Adieu!
Adieu? Oh, ay! *Farewell!* . . . yet not fare-
well. . . .

No more may Aphrodité be such bride
To thee as she. . . . Alas! Alas!” she cried.
I seized her then, her resolution tried
So sorely, that she, moaning, made to tell
I should once more take all my last long fill
Of her; but, soon as I had had my will,
She must be gone for ever from my side—
In mortal shape, that is. . . . And here the
tide,
Meseemed, spake sudden from a falling wave
Of deeper tone than heretofore. She gave
A nod of piteous gesture to the sea:
Her smooth throat shuddered as she echoed,
“Hark!”

And in her eyes a birth of tears grew dark:
And then she gave her lovely self to me.

But of some things we spake. . . . I shall not tell
Of that last anguish of our mingled lives,
That like some unforgetful fever drives
Along my blood this moment. How she made,
As the stars strengthen, so desire in me
More manifest with lovely light and shade.
This may I:—At the last we kissed farewell,
There by the shore of that dark evening sea,
That ne'er may fade from out my memory
Till life's last pulse has faded in a knell. . . .
Yea, we stood up together at the last:
She had looked seaward thrice: her blown hair
 fell
In whispering, wild sadness—"It is past!"—
About my breast. . . . The tide was calling home

36 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

My lovely one. She shivered in a blast
That sounded like a summons from the foam
She might not disobey. . . . And then I heard
Far out upon the sea-line, near the sun,
A murmur of waves falling grow to one
Clear word, that shone like sea-birds, seen
 afar,

Shine when they leave the water suddenly;
And silent as the foam fades, or a star
Among wide waste sea-waters was that word
The sea-line spake to me.
And, as it came, the trees around were stirred
Strangely, as of some Sorrow passing through:
And the wind rose three sudden times and
 shrilled,

And at the sound the shadow of the sea
Passed over eyes that had been heaven's hue;
And thrice her hair was shaken as it filled,

APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD 37

With sharp, small sounds she stifled ere they
grew

Larger and tore my ears, while passion thrilled
Her tightened arms. And then our lips with-
drew

That had shut hard in stricken hold on each :

And blind with parting's pain

I stood where we had lain ;

And from our bridal-bed had last of speech

With her, my bride. For now she turned again—

The tide was round her little feet—and called ;

And all the sea in echo rose and fell :

“Farewell, O Love! O Mortal Love, farewell!

We have not loved in vain!

Already in me quickens graft of thee!

And all my womb, with mortal love enthralled,

Shall burgeon with fresh fruit of Poetry!

That poetry which makes men to me turn,

38 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Even as thou didst mix with me, to make
My love a meaning so their senses ache
With purer passion when their lust shall burn :—
Seeing that loveless lust begets a rod,
Whereby the soul is beaten from the brute,
And the blind brute knows but the beast for
 God;

Till God's own voice be mute,
Where blasphemy for ugliness doth yearn.
And now I go! Take comfort! I am near
When thou shalt clasp some tender woman kind!
Surely, I promise thee, shall be more dear
Her kisses, for my teaching!" And the wind
Spake of a sudden, solemn; and the trees
Shook, all together; and a shape of foam
Clung wildly white upon her, round her knees:
Her hair, her hand, waved; and she turned her
 home.

Then from the bower of birch-trees, that had
hung

With tender tapestries our joys, and sung
Our bridal benison, I brake and cried,
As one from whom love's last despair has wrung
Hatred of future living. In the tide,
As men may fling life from them, then I flung,
And sought my death in tombs that held my
bride.

But with soft strength resistless I was borne,
Three separate times of struggle, back to land—
She would not let me drown. So life forlorn
Went up with baffled death once more to stand
'Midst those green imprints of impassioned
hours,

Where fragrant from her body lay the grass,
And the mute stems of broken bluebell-flowers
Bore bridal-witness. Thence I saw her pass

40 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

Toward the falling darkness far away,—
Her gold hair like a floating flame. Alas!
The lovely golden head that might not stay.
Swift sank the sun from out our wedding-
day

And sorrowful for me that sundown showed
The while I watched her, passing, float afar.
Till, in her place, there loomed a sudden star
And through a mist of purple twilight glowed
Insistent, white, and wonderful. And soon,
As one that sees a darkness on the moon,
Infected with an earthlight, shape and shine—
Upon the shadow of the further coast
I saw, above the wan foam-water's line,
A glooming shape that floated on the dark
Of April's ebbing flood, against a ghost—
Like a faint flame that silver limbs display—
And glimmered lonely o'er the wave: a stark,

Still shape that gloomed beside a silver ray—
The crescent of a month that might be May.

And, as befouled by some larger sense,
By passion brought to birth for vain delight—
Whose wings, alas, are less than infinite,
Nay, weak as wide and wild with the Immense—
My soul beat blindly down that bridal-night
Whose joy was flown before its screen of stars
Had dropped a veil of splendours dark and
bright

On love's own splendid shame. As iron bars
The darks that shut upon me seemed, and rang
As iron rings reverberant when my soul,
Too feeble for the quest on which it sprang,
Shuddered upon them; till such strong control
As Frenzy has for madmen rioted
Its own despair to ruin that was ease,

42 APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD

And the mad stars, distraught as mine own head,
Grew quiet with their old accustomed peace.
Then like a man from such a grave arisen
As holds the springtide-splendours of a dream,
'Gainst which is life a thing grown pale in prison,
My soul went sadly forward down a stream
Of half-remembered twilight things that draw
The patient pulses from their sleepy blood
Back into power of living. Soon I saw
The darkness break and scatter from a wood,
Familiar with a host of laughing leaves
In England's loveliest late April mood,
That drew my feet by threads of grassy track
Adown green slopes and sunlight. Sense con-
ceives

No light so swift as then came rolling back
The town above, the bridge whereon I stood.

* * * * * *

APHRODITE AT LEATHERHEAD 43

Then I awoke, and watched a little space
The four small streams grow into one; and heard
A train behind me whistle. But the place
Was strange for Surrey still. And afterward,
Her name clung to my ears, her glory glowed,
At every bend along the London road.

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